

Cheaters don't win with WAPS

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The Air Force's Weighted Airman Promotion System was introduced almost 30 years ago to ensure the most qualified individuals are promoted and to provide an objective, equitable and understandable process.

Many members felt that the system in place before then wasn't fair and was impartial.

WAPS is comprised of six factors: two promotion tests, awards and decorations, enlisted performance reports, time in service, and time in grade. Members receive points for each factor.

The total number of points is used to determine which members of a career field are selected for a limited number of promotions. The promotion tests contribute the largest portion to the total and arguably are the most important test an enlisted member takes.

Unfortunately, individuals attempting to "beat" the system have compromised several of those tests.

They have cheated!

Although only a very small percentage of testers cheat, even one cheater is too many.

When someone resorts to cheating to tilt the odds to his favor, it's a direct affront to Air Force Core Values. It's also a direct affront to those who studied hard, taking time away from their children and families, and yet didn't get promoted because someone else cheated. Honest members may lose faith in a system that was designed to be fair, yet isn't because some individuals have an unjust advantage over others.

Let's assume "Sgt Smith" was promoted over "Sgt Jones" because "Sgt Smith" cheated. "Sgt Jones" has lost a higher rank and higher pay, but perhaps he has also lost things harder to quantify, such as time and effort put into studying, self-confidence and motivation. "Sgt Jones" may have also been better qualified for the promotion,

and the implications of unqualified individuals being promoted can be staggering.

For example, would you want to ride in an airplane that was maintained by someone who cheated to get promoted and may not have the knowledge necessary to do the job properly? Or worse yet, because of the promotion he is supervising the work unit.

In recent courts-martial for WAPS compromise a master sergeant was convicted and sentenced to a two-stripe reduction in rank and 45 days of hard labor without confinement, and a staff

sergeant received a bad conduct discharge, reduction to senior airman and 30 days confinement. Due to a pretrial agreement, however, the BCD and reduction in rank were

suspended. Another staff sergeant opted for dismissal in lieu of courts-martial for WAPS compromise. These individuals had a combined total of 42 years in the Air Force, and their careers will never be the same again.

Through the years, I have provided expert testimony at many courts-martial about how WAPS works. I've heard many excuses from individuals who have been convicted, ranging from an unpleasant childhood, a "momentary" lapse in judgment, being pressured by someone else to cheat or financial problems. I've heard them speak of their sick mother, brother or grandmother who depends on their support. I've heard them speak of otherwise stellar, shining careers serving their country. I've listened as they talked about how the proceedings are affecting their children or families, about the trauma caused by the death of their childhood pet and about their own medical conditions. I've often wondered what any of these issues had to do with an individual deciding to cheat.

Why didn't they think of their careers or families before making this decision? I've also wondered if the pride that comes from earning their next stripe on their own isn't important to these people. I've even heard some

of these servicemembers proclaim they have integrity.

One of the definitions of "integrity" is "honesty." Cheating isn't honest, and WAPS compromise goes against the very nature of integrity, our first core value. To put it as plainly as possible, cheating to get promoted is the same as stealing. Anyone who understands how the system works knows this to be true. When an individual or individuals have an advantage over others, the system is no longer as fair as it should be — its integrity has been damaged. The system as a whole still has integrity, however, we can't ignore the damage done to it by compromise.

One other thing I've seen lacking in many of these cases is a sense of personal responsibility. Some of those who have been convicted seem to find it easy to point the finger at the person who provided them the illegal material or to blame the system. I've also seen the finger of blame pointed at those individuals who had the courage to come forward when they knew about or suspected WAPS compromise, even though those individuals were doing the right thing by trying to protect the integrity of the system.

Ultimately, we are the only ones responsible for our actions. It doesn't matter what kind of childhood we had, how many temptations we've faced, how badly we needed the money or what everyone else is doing. We make the final decision. If the decision turns out to have negative consequences, as some decisions do, then we should accept them without making excuses or blaming others. Sadly, a lack of personal responsibility seems to be an epidemic in our society as a whole these days.

As a result of test compromise, we've implemented new methods to identify cheaters and improve the security of the system. It's our goal to provide the most objective enlisted promotion system possible, and we make great efforts to ensure that we meet that goal.

Individuals competing under WAPS shouldn't place their careers and reputations in jeopardy by not following the rules. It's not worth the potential consequences. The bottom line is that WAPS works as long as everyone plays by the rules. WAPS compromise affects us all, whether we are enlisted, officers or civilians.



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